



# RSVP Connections

## Connecting Senior Volunteers with Community Needs

### March 2004

*Dear RSVP Volunteers and Friends,*

While the IRS looks only at numbers, RSVP's federal funding source (Corporation for National and Community Service) requires a report of the **impact** of the program's volunteers. "Impact" goes beyond the number of hours that our volunteers give (an astonishing 92,000 hours in a 6-month period July 1- December 31, 2003). Impact data measures how the community is better because of the work accomplished by our volunteers during those hours.

Volunteer stations provided plenty of evidence that our 1100 RSVP volunteers make a **resounding impact** on our community:

Transportation: Volunteers at Rural Transit helped provide 18,147 rides for almost 3,000 elderly, disabled, and low-income individuals. Volunteers with the DAV Transportation Program at the VA gave rides to medical appointments for over 7,000 veterans.

Cultural Heritage: Volunteers at the Buffalo & Erie County Naval & Military Park conducted tours for almost 4,000 visitors, and spent 365 hours doing maintenance and updates on the ships and submarine, including over 100 hours re-wiring and re-configuring electrical work.

*"The mighty avalanche starts with a single snowflake."*

Food Distribution: Volunteers with the area's home-delivered meals programs delivered thousands of meals to elderly and disabled individuals. Volunteers at food pantries/dining rooms distributed 5000+ bags of food, and served over 50,000 meals to people in need. Volunteers at the Food Shuttle transported donated food from grocery stores and restaurants to agencies serving those in poverty—more than 20 tons!

Companionship: RSVP volunteers with the Telephone Assurance Program made 1200 calls to frail homebound elderly persons. 87% of the clients said those phone calls make a real difference in their lives. One client summed it up this way: "She's like a sister to me".

The list goes on and on. When you add up the things that RSVP volunteers do every day, the results show an amazing force at work:

This issue of *RSVP Connections* spotlights volunteer opportunities in programs that impact the lives of children and adults with disabilities. The purpose of these programs is not to "do for" their clients, but rather to challenge, to expand the world, and to provide access to new experiences. Through innovation, adaptation, persistence, and willpower, it becomes possible for almost anyone to: surf the internet, land a fish, ride on the back of a horse, and even perform in front of thousands of fans at HSBC Arena.

*Patricia Dowling, RSVP Director*

Please remember to wear your RSVP badge when you are at your regular volunteer assignment or helping out at a "one-time" special event. It's an easy way to let people know that RSVP is making a difference in our community!

## EXCALIBUR

It's hard to imagine a summer in Western New York without time spent at the lake or the river...fishing, sailing, or just watching the sunset over the waves. But for many of our residents who have physical, mental, or emotional challenges, or who have limited economic resources, the joy of a simple boat ride may be an impossible dream.

However, volunteers at **Excalibur** make this dream come true for thousands of individuals with special needs. Excalibur's mission is to provide cost-free boating and fishing opportunities for disabled and disadvantaged persons. The idea for a boat accessible for disabled persons started with Jim Catalano, now the Executive Director. Jim, who at that time was a special education teacher, brought his students to the lake for an afternoon of fishing. He watched how they responded to being near the



water, and to the exhilaration of catching a fish. He realized the therapeutic benefits could be shared by others. Through the hard work of Jim and a broad base of supporters, Excalibur obtained a boat, and then modified it to become wheelchair accessible—the first of its kind! Excalibur also boasts the first accessible dock in the country.

Excalibur averages 5600 hours annually of actual on-the-water-programming for 2800 of our most needy neighbors, providing passengers with 2-hour fishing expeditions or tours of the Buffalo waterfront during the summer months. There are usually 5 trips per day, operating between 10 am and 8 pm. Current capacity of the boat is 15 passengers and 3 crew members.

Excalibur's passengers come from 125 agencies in WNY, including nursing homes, agencies serving mentally retarded and developmentally disabled persons, mental health service agencies, and programs for inner city children. Excalibur has often fulfilled the wishes of a terminally ill person by providing a full day of fishing. The policy is that if the agency can get the individual to the boat, then Excalibur will provide access to the lake.

Excalibur needs enthusiastic volunteers to share the fun of fishing and boating with the many adults and children who look forward to their day on the water. Primary volunteer opportunities are: 1) Captains who must complete the Coast Guard's training and obtain a license to operate a passenger boat; 2) Escorts to assist passengers to board, put on life jackets, and enjoy the 2-hour boat tour; or 3) Office assistants to assist with filing, data entry, and other clerical needs.

RSVP volunteer Joyce Herold is a long-time escort for Excalibur. She is a volunteer who is willing to take on almost anything—whether it's cleaning up the boat in the Spring for Coast Guard inspection, or filling in at the last minute for an open shift. "But I don't do worms!" laughs Joyce. "They call me the social director." Joyce hasn't always been a boat person, and learned to swim only when her children were older. Joyce emphasizes that the most important qualification for an Excalibur volunteer is not knowledge of boating, but rather acceptance of each individual passenger. Excalibur provides service for passengers of all ages, and with every type of disability.

The volunteers with Excalibur have no doubt that they make a difference to everyone aboard the boat. "Some of the passengers can't even speak", said Joyce, "but they show their appreciation. That's why this is so rewarding to me."

## SABAH

- Take one professional ice skating instructor with a vision.
- Add some ice rinks, hundreds of skates, and miles of fabric.
- Apply the courage and hard work of children, youth and adults facing physical, mental and emotional challenges.
- Stir in time, talent and devotion of over 1800 volunteers.....
- And you've got the recipe for the incredible success of the **Skating Association for the Blind and Handicapped, or SABAH, Inc.!**



2003 SABAH Ice Show

In 1976, Elizabeth O'Donnell had an idea to teach children and adults who were blind to ice skate. The program began with six skaters who were blind aided by 10 volunteers. This year, SABAH presented its 27<sup>th</sup> Annual Ice Show, "Tune In To TV". Many of the skating stars rely on special safety and adaptive equipment, such as sling seats, walkers, harnesses, and custom skates. But the audience's attention is not on the disabilities of the skater, but on the smiles and joy apparent on each skater's face. The ice rink at HSBC Arena was the stage for hundreds of stories of people facing challenges, meeting personal goals, and realizing dreams. Two of these stories belong to this year's soloists:

Seventh-grader Annie Brady, blind since birth, performed cross-overs, spirals, and spins. She had started as a six year old skating with a walker.

Ten-year-old Krista Kellner, a Disney aficionado, was glowing for the crowd during her interpretation of "When You Wish Upon a Star". Krista, who is diagnosed with autism, has progressed since her first Ice Show in 1998 when she was so overwhelmed by the large crowd and constant activity that she cried throughout the entire production.

"Tune In To TV" spotlighted popular television shows, complete with the familiar theme music and skaters dressed as the characters. Batman and Robin opened the show. "Sesame Street" featured skaters dressed as Cookie Monster and Oscar the Grouch. Poodle skirts and leather jackets abounded in the "Happy Days" act. Skaters performed as Fred Flintstone, Gilligan and the Skipper, Captain Kirk, and many others.

I was particularly eager to see the "Peanuts" gang. Only a few weeks before, I had joined up with a group of RSVP volunteers at the Amherst Senior Center who were sewing costumes for Charlie Brown, Snoopy, and Woodstock. At this session, the sewers were attaching the nose and eyes to Snoopy's face, or as Libby Kauppila, the SABAH sewing coordinator (also a volunteer) described it, "They're putting the personality into these puppies." Sewers throughout Western New York assembled more than 1400 costumes for the stars and on-ice volunteers involved in the show.



It is not necessary to know how to skate in order to get involved with SABAH. There are many ways to help, both on the ice and off the ice. All SABAH volunteers provide skaters and their families with friendship, encouragement and support. If interested, call RSVP at 858-7548.

Pictured left to right: RSVP Volunteers Mickey Kisbaugh, Anna Weber, and Irene Gorski sewing Snoopy costumes at the Amherst Senior Center for "Tune into TV".

## LOTHLORIEN THERAPEUTIC RIDING CENTER

In the land of the Hobbits envisioned by J.R.R. Tolkien, Lothlorien translates to “The Land of Flowering Dreams.” At **Lothlorien Therapeutic Riding Center** in East Aurora, staff and volunteers make dreams blossom for people with physical, mental, and emotional challenges.

Lothlorien is one of the top therapeutic riding centers in the world. Since 1983, Lothlorien has provided instruction in therapeutic riding for individuals with mental, physical, emotional, and learning disabilities. Located on 13 rolling acres, Lothlorien has 16 trusted and loyal horses specially trained for their riders’ special needs, and the facilities include specially built mounting ramps and a wide variety of adaptive equipment.

Therapeutic riding has many benefits. Riders may experience improvements in balance, coordination, range of motion, and strength of head, trunk, and leg muscles. In addition, there may be increased attention span, self-esteem, communication skills and social skills. At Lothlorien, riders are able to concentrate on their ability, not the disability. A child with cerebral palsy can enjoy the pleasure of riding on the back of a beautiful horse. A troubled teenager who has repeatedly experienced failures and disappointments slowly gains a sense of trust and self esteem through the process of learning to ride. Family members treasure the riders’ smiles and accomplishments.



Many students at Lothlorien need assistance riding their ponies or horses. This is where volunteers take an active part in making the program work —Volunteers are trained by Lothlorien staff and work under supervision of specially trained registered riding instructors. There may be as many as three volunteers with each student, especially in the beginning stages of riding. The leader is responsible for primary control of the horse, and takes direction from the instructor as to how much the rider can or should do. One or more “sidewalkers” are responsible for walking beside the rider to give physical or moral support, as well as verbal or physical cues. Volunteers also can assist with grooming horses, office tasks, or even maintaining the gardens and grounds at Lothlorien.

Lothlorien’s program runs from March to November. There are three 8-week sessions during the season. Each class is approximately one hour. If you enjoy being around horses and special people, Lothlorien has a special volunteer opportunity for you! Call RSVP at 858-7548.

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The **Elder Law Fair** is **Thursday, May 20, 2004** from 8:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at the Hearthstone Manor, 333 Dick Road, Depew. **FREE** Seminars include Grandparents’ Rights, Medicare Prescription Drug Plan, and more. *Theatre for Change* will perform scenes entitled “Can We Talk?” which addresses the importance of advance planning and how families can reduce the conflicts that often arise over personal matters. **Register by calling 858-8544.**

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Senior Services wants to know about living examples of "**Aging Well, Living Well**" and to showcase local senior accomplishments. Nominate someone who has made significant contributions to improve quality of life in this community... Explain in less than 100 words and send to: Senior Services-Aging Well, Living Well, 95 Franklin St.-13th Floor, Buffalo, NY 14202 or email to [SeniorInfo@erie.gov](mailto:SeniorInfo@erie.gov). Photos are welcome, but cannot be returned.

## P.A.T.T.

The prospect of logging on to a computer for the first time might provoke feelings of anxiety and self-doubt for an older adult who hasn't "grown up with computers." Now consider the challenge faced by a first time computer user with severe vision loss.



RSVP volunteer Richard Buscemi understands this challenge. Born with normal vision, Richard lost his eyesight at age 50 after contracting meningitis. Following months of hospitalization and recovery, Richard decided to consider the loss as a challenge. As a U.S. Navy veteran, he was eligible for services through the Dept. of Veterans Affairs Visual Impairment Services Team (VIST). At a 6-week training, Richard learned to use adaptive devices to tell time and keep appointments, use the telephone, shave, dress, and other living skills.

Richard had been a mechanical designer, and so was eager to learn adaptive software and hardware for the computer. Through VIST, he attended intensive technology training classes for visually impaired veterans. Veterans who successfully complete this training receive their own computers and adaptive technology. Richard realized that his success in the program was due in part to his familiarity with computers. He was concerned about fellow veterans, especially older veterans, who might have no experience with computers. These veterans were less likely to successfully complete the training, or even agree to try. Richard began to plan a program that would introduce veterans to the computer so that they would eventually gain enough confidence and skills to take the VIST intensive technology training.

The **Pre/Post Assistance Technology Training (PATT)** was put together by the Buffalo Chapter of New York Region Blinded Veterans Association, of which Richard is president. For the past 10 months, Richard has been working with vision impaired veterans at the VA Western New York Healthcare System two days per week, offering basic computer training and assistance with using specialized equipment. Students learn to use Open Book (a screen reader and scanner which help the user to read books, magazines, bills, and other printed documents), JAWS (a software program that reads information from a computer display and speaks it to a user through a speech synthesizer) and Dragon (a program that turns speech into computer text).

Richard's first student has completed the technology training. Another student, a Vietnam veteran, overcame his initial anxieties about learning the computer through Richard's persistent encouragement. "I reminded him that he had been through battle," Richard recalls "The computer at least couldn't shoot him." That student will attend the technology training later this year. Another student, 82-year-old Army veteran Washington Bennett, had purchased his own computer and adaptive software with plans to learn from computer-savvy friends and family, but this proved to be unsuccessful. Richard explains that it is difficult for a sighted person to train a person with vision loss because they cannot easily adapt to the pace and other needs of the student. Mr. Bennett is progressing well. "I want to learn to use the computer the way that people use their eyes," he says. This includes reading books and mail, balancing a checkbook, and managing personal finances.

Elaine Powers, VIST Coordinator, sees the benefits of veterans working with veterans. "When veterans first come here after being diagnosed as legally blind, they are in shock. They start with the attitude that they can't do anything—they can't read, they can't drive. They learn from one another about how much they *can* do."



## NEW AND EXCITING RSVP OPPORTUNITIES!

Call RSVP at 858-7548

**HOSPITALITY AMBASSADOR PROGRAM:** Serve as a regional goodwill emissary by providing courteous, friendly assistance and useful information to people in the Buffalo Niagara International Airport. Volunteers strive to make each visitor's encounter with the airport a positive experience, and help travelers enjoy their trip to the Niagara Region. Volunteers also provide information on regional services and attractions. Volunteers are provided parking at no charge in the ramp during their volunteer time.

**USDA NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE:** Earth Team volunteers are needed to commit their time and talent to conserve and protect soil, water, and wildlife for our community. Volunteers join professional conservationists as they work directly with local farmers in putting conservation practices on the land. The Earth Team may help to prevent wind and water erosion, conserve and clean up water, reduce flooding, or help citizens of all ages learn about the environment and conservation.

**NATIONAL  
VOLUNTEER  
WEEK,  
April 18-24, 2004**  
Thank You, RSVP  
Volunteers, For  
Making A Better  
Tomorrow Today!

**COMMUNITY CONCERN:** Many seniors become isolated due to illness and disability, lack of transportation, and family living at a distance. Volunteers are needed in the South-towns as Friendly Visitors for homebound elderly persons. Volunteers also may help the elderly person with shopping, errands, and light household tasks.

**HOPEVALE, INC.** Would you like to be a positive role model in the life of a young person who is struggling with difficulties in family, school, and community? At a residential school in Hamburg, volunteers can provide tutoring, accompany students on social outings, or just listen and be a friend.

**COMPEER OF GREATER BUFFALO:** At any given time, millions of Americans suffer from a mental illness that requires professional treatment. They often experience devastating loneliness, isolation, and the intense misunderstanding associated with mental illness. Volunteers are needed to provide friendship and positive role models, and to help raise self-esteem and increase social skills for children and adults diagnosed with mental illness.

**BUFFALO & ERIE COUNTY BOTANICAL GARDENS:** Do you love to garden? Do you want to learn more about exotic plants and how to care for them? Would you like to share the wonder and beauty of nature with others? Volunteers are needed to help with maintaining the gardens in one of the jewels of our region, to provide tours of the gardens, and to assist with special events.

**CHECK IT OUT:** The Buffalo & Erie County Botanical Gardens is growing gardeners! The Gardens has an ongoing series of educational classes and workshops, and a rare and unusual plant sale scheduled for May 14-15. Call 827-1584 for more information.

**PASS IT ON!** You are RSVP's most effective ambassador! Share the joys of volunteering with your friends and families...pass on this newsletter after you read it!

## WELCOME NEW RSVP VOLUNTEERS...WE'RE GLAD YOU JOINED US

### JANUARY

CHMELKO, ROBERT G.  
CONKLIN, DONALD E.  
JENDROWSKI, PHYLLIS J.  
KLOC, RICHARD A.  
KLUSEK, CARRIE  
KORNACKI, JAMES L.  
LANDGRAF, WILLIAM A.  
MONTGOMERY, DAVID L.  
PERRY, EVA M.  
PRICE, BREN T., SR  
PRICE, MARILYN E.  
SCHOEDEL, DOLORES E.

OPERATION GOOD NEIGHBOR  
FOOD SHUTTLE  
AMERICAN RED CROSS  
V.A. HOSPITAL  
V.A.. HOSPITAL  
KEN-TON MEALS ON WHEELS  
V.A. HOSPITAL  
RURAL TRANSIT-HOLLAND/SARDINIA  
EC STAY FIT SENIOR FITNESS PROGRAM  
RSVP - SPECIAL PROJECTS  
RSVP - SPECIAL PROJECTS  
LOVEJOY CAREGIVERS

### FEBRUARY

CHISHOLM, IRENE D.  
DEPPELER, FRANCES K.  
LEWIS, SIMA R.  
McMAHON, WILLIAM E.  
MCMULLON, JOANNE M.  
MILLITELLO, ANTHONY  
MONTGOMERY, KAY A.  
PAUTLER, ISABEL  
POSMANTUR, ESTHER S.  
ROBERTS, JOHN C.  
RUPERT, MARILYN E.  
SCHAEFER, SHIRLEY M.  
SCHOMBER, CHARLES J.  
SEIVERT, RITA M.  
SILLATO, ALBERT  
VOHWINKLE, RONALD C.  
WESOLOWSKI, NINA  
ZECHLIN, META  
ZELAZNY, PATRICIA

B&EC MEALS ON WHEELS - ANGOLA  
B & EC BOTANICAL GARDENS  
EC STAY FIT SENIOR FITNESS PROGRAM  
RURAL TRANSIT-HOLLAND/SARDINIA  
USDA CONSERVATION  
RURAL TRANSIT-EVANS  
RURAL TRANSIT-HOLLAND/SARDINIA  
BROTHERS OF MERCY(SACRED HEART)  
EC STAY FIT SENIOR FITNESS PROGRAM  
SOUTHTOWNS MEALS ON WHEELS  
B & EC BOTANICAL GARDENS  
BROTHERS OF MERCY  
AMERICAN CANCER SOCIETY  
B & EC BOTANICAL GARDENS  
BROTHERS OF MERCY  
FOOD SHUTTLE  
BROTHERS OF MERCY(SACRED HEART)  
B & EC BOTANICAL GARDENS  
B & EC BOTANICAL GARDENS

### MARCH, 2004

INMAN, EBER L.  
MORGAN, FREDERICK H.

RURAL TRANSIT-EVANS  
VETERANS ADMINISTRATION

Call RSVP at 858-7548 to find out about specific volunteer needs at our sites such as...

- **Weinberg Campus**- a morning person to help out in the deli
- **Rural Transit** – drivers, especially for the wheelchair van
- **American Red Cross** – people to provide information about becoming a platelet donor,

And many many more!



**SAVE THE DATE:** RSVP Annual Tribute Day Luncheon will be held on **Friday, October 1, 2004** at the Hearthstone Manor. All volunteers with 20 or more hours of service are invited to attend at no charge. If you need additional hours of service, call the RSVP office for our list of volunteer opportunities.

**SPECIAL PROJECT VOLUNTEERS:** We have been getting an enthusiastic response to our volunteer opportunities for “one-day” and special events. Agencies are always very grateful for your help!

**From the Kids Escaping Drugs Campaign:** “In giving the gift of yourself, you have given countless young people the gift of hope, the gift of health, and indeed the gift of a life free of addiction. We are truly blessed to have such wonderful friends and helpers.”

**From the Food Bank, Meals on Wheels of Buffalo & Erie County, Autistic Services:** Thanks to the RSVP volunteers who came out to the local malls during the busy holiday season to help each of these agencies to have successful fundraisers!

**From Roswell Park Cancer Institute:** Thanks to the unbelievable team at Baptist Manor for packaging more than 30,000 emery boards into 100-count bags! These emery boards, printed with the telephone number for smoking cessation help, will be mailed to WIC programs throughout New York..

**RSVP Van:** Please note that the RSVP van schedule has been changed to 4 days per week. The van is currently not running on Tuesdays. There still are a few openings on the other days. If you are unable to drive or take the bus to your volunteer site, and need the van, please call us.

The RSVP office wants to hear from you. We’d like to hear about our volunteers’ success stories, new projects, or treasured moments at the volunteer sites. We also ask you to call us if:

- you have a change in address, phone number, emergency contact, or automobile insurance information
- you have a change in your volunteer assignment, or to add an additional volunteer site.
- you won’t be available to volunteer for a month or more

**You can phone us at 858-7548 or e-mail at [dowlingp@erie.gov](mailto:dowlingp@erie.gov).**

RSVP of Erie County  
Dept. of Senior Services  
95 Franklin St., 13th Floor  
Buffalo, NY 14202